

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PN, PFOR

SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S REMARKS ON PANAMA AT ORLANDO, FLORIDA
SEPTEMBER 16, 1975

FOLLOWING IS AN UNCLEARED, UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT OF THE
SECRETARY'S RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ON THE PANAMA CANAL
NEGOTIATIONS AT THE SOUTHERN GOVERNORS' CONFERENCE AT
ORLANDO YESTERDAY (9/16/75). IT IS TRANSMITTED FOR THE
EMBASSY'S INFORMATION ONLY AND IS NOT FOR RELEASE TO ANYONE
PENDING A CHECK ON ITS ACCURACY WITH THE OFFICIAL TRANS-
CRIPT WHICH WE HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED:

Q: (GOVERNOR GEORGE WALLACE, ALABAMA) MR. SECRETARY, AFTER
THE UNFORTUNATE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER OF INDOCHINA, DO
YOU FEEL THAT THE UNITED STATES NOW CAN AFFORD TO GIVE UP
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CONTROL OF THE PANAMA CANAL?

A: ON THE ISSUE OF THE PANAMA CANAL--THE QUESTION IS, WHAT
IS MEANT BY CONTROL OF THE PANAMA CANAL AND HOW DO WE

DEFINE OUR VITAL INTERESTS IN RELATIONS TO THE PANAMA CANAL? THE UNITED STATES MUST MAINTAIN THE RIGHT UNILATERALLY TO DEFEND THE PANAMA CANAL FOR AN INDEFINITE FUTURE, OR FOR A LONG FUTURE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE UNITED STATES CAN EASE SOME OF ITS OTHER CONDITIONS IN THE CANAL ZONE. OUR PROBLEM WITH RESPECT TO THE PANAMA CANAL ZONE IS THIS: HOW DO WE BEST DEFEND OUR DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS THAT ARE VITAL IN THE PANAMA CANAL AREA? DO WE DO IT MOST EFFECTIVELY BY DIGGING IN, TURNING PANAMA INTO A POTENTIAL AREA OF GUERRILLA CONFLICT BACKED BY ALL OF LATIN AMERICA AND TURNING IT INTO A ISSUE OF PERMANENT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ALL OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE UNITED STATES IN WHICH MILITARY FORCE MAY HAVE TO BE USED FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD, OR IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS IN WHICH OUR DEFENSE INTEREST CAN BE MAINTAINED FOR MANY DECADES AND OUR OPERATING INTERESTS CAN ALSO BE MAINTAINED FOR SEVERAL DECADES AND THEREBY DEFUSE THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION? NOBODY IS IN FAVOR OF TURNING OVER OUR DEFENSE OF THE PANAMA CANAL AND NOBODY IS IN FAVOR OF TURNING OVER THE ESSENTIAL OPERATING REQUIREMENTS. WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT IS WHETHER WE CAN DEVELOP A STATUS FOR THE PANAMA CANAL--AND WE ARE NOT SURE YET THAT THIS CAN BE DONE--THAT MEETS OUR ESSENTIAL DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS AND AVOIDS THE SITUATION IN WHICH WE MAY HAVE A VITE-NAM TYPE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA FOR THE INDEFINITE FUTURE BACKED BY ALL OF LATIN AMERICA. IF WE CAN FIND AN HONORABLE WAY OF DOING IT, WE WOULD LIKE TO EXPLORE IT. AS WE EXPLORE IT, WE WILL CONSULT CLOSELY WITH THE INTERESTED MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESS, AND THERE WILL NOT BE ANY SECRET NEGOTIATIONS THAT ARE SPRUNG ON PEOPLE UNEXPECTEDLY. THIS IS REALLY THE ISSUE. WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF EXPLORING IT AND I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER IT IS POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE WHAT I'VE DESCRIBED. IF IT ISN'T, THEN THERE CAN BE NO AGREEMENT. END OF SECRETARY'S REMARKS AT GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE.

THE FOLLOWING GUIDANCE WAS PREPARED ON AN "IF ASKED"
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BASIS FOR THE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S NOON BRIEFING TODAY.
THE BRIEFING WAS CANCELLED AND IT WAS NOT USED: (9/17/75)

Q: HOW DO YOU INTERPRET PANAMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER TACK'S RESPONSE TO THE SECRETARY'S REMARKS ON THE PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AT THE SOUTHERN GOVERNORS' CONFERENCE YESTERDAY IN ORLANDO?

A: THE PANAMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER WAS REACTING TO PRESS REPORTS WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT DISTORTED OR MISINTERPRETED. ONE SOURCE OF MISUNDERSTANDING MAY HAVE BEEN THE SECRETARY'S USE OF THE WORD "INDEFINITE" IN DESCRIB-

ING THE DURATION OF U.S. RIGHTS TO DEFEND THE PANAMA CANAL. LOOKING AT THE TRANSCRIPT OF THE SECRETARY'S REMARKS IT IS CLEAR THAT HE INTENDED TO AVOID GIVING A DEFINITE PERIOD OF TIME SINCE THE MATTER IS STILL BEING TREATED IN OUR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PANAMANIANS. CLEARLY, HE DID NOT INTEND TO CONTRADICT THE JOINT U.S.-PANAMA STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES WHICH COMMITS THE U.S., IN PART, TO A NEW FIXED TERM TREATY. END PREPARED QUIDANCE. KISSINGER

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